



Nightmare Cemetery

A Hallowe'en Frolic

by

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Providence 1964

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Siste Viator!

*All the characters in this book
are entirely imaginary
including the Author*

Prelude

Dusk . . .

dusk deepening . . .

From the church-yard sod

rises a wreath of bats;

there is no sound but their soft

chittering as they sweep the ground

'twixt the last asters and dead goldenrod.

Like foul mosquitoes, hungrily they scud
searching the turf, head-stones, till they have found
the open oblong with the expectant mound.

At last here is their feast of dead blood.

Beneath a willow stands a youth alone,
cloaked and with harp half-strung. The saturnine
pale light seeps from a late and ovate moon
rising behind him; by its glimmering light
he stares into the pit, sees there his own
dead face,

which also happens to be mine.

Snap! Now the eye-trick changes: the moonlight
swells instantly to the glow of my desk-lamp.

Furnace warmth has replaced autumn damp.
It is not dusk but well after midnight.
The unnameable grave twitches from black to white,
this oblong paper, whereto the bat-thoughts ramp,
a challenge to my ancient writer's-cramp
till I, the aged youth, am stung to write.

O pen, thaumaturge wand, what visions rise!
Shall we explore? Dare you follow the leader?
Our game may lead to deeps below all morning.
Do you expect to look straight through my eyes
even into my bowels? I give fair warning:
there you may see your own pale face, dear reader.



Now I stumble to a pause.

Three forced syllables, flat, hollow, terse,
and unevocative; for nothing stirs
behind futurity's voluminous gauze.

Well, write them down. You shall be; and I was.

I cannot paraphrase you better or worse,
you, non-existent purpose of my verse,
- non-existent, and yet its Final Cause.

The Deep in me cries to the Deep in you,
transfiguring the incomprehensible.

Angels carol new tunes above the hoarse
demoniac basso-ostinato yell;

in all their counterpoint, one weak fact is true:
you can hear my words; I do not hear yours.

This vacant page! - a window creamed with ice
on which a child, across frost-fern and tree
crystallized there, scratches bunglingly
the letters of his name, through which he tries
to scan the emptiness of sable skies
and snow-locked, aching earth. And I am he
scrawling on this cold page, in hopes to see
through, into the future - of *your* eyes.

Yours, reader, yours; yours! yours! Do I succeed
in piercing to your gaze? And can I burst
into your brain? Can you see my eyes, too,
following, trying to catch yours, as they read
the clumsy letters of my name reversed?
Can you not sense them stiffly staring through?

All I have written is my epitaph -
dim phrases failing utterly to define
that inmost thing I'd like to think divine,
but inexpressible by groan or laugh.
Though I have tried, I have not written half
even of the facts that fitted my design
of words; nothing in all my books is mine;
nothing authentic but the autograph.

I tried to write my name: that much seemed needed.
And I have failed if it has found a place
only beneath the title. But I succeeded
if in this verbal wilderness and valley
sometimes you hear a voice you cannot place
that speaks your own name softly, authentically.

In every poem, something is sure to die;
something sinks helplessly back into the abyss;
plucked away from the momentary kiss,
its message stifled to a muted cry.
And so with life: no matter how we try
to say what living means, where we found bliss,
we sink in hideous metamorphosis,
our half-delivered message blurred to Why.

Still, after-images blend in a gleam
that glows awhile, however fugitive.
I have wakened, yet so it is with me:
although my presence has gone past memory,
now, while your eyes rest on this page, I live,
an accidental figment of your dream.

Why should I bother to write? Why should you cast
a single glance upon these fading pages?

The answers, I suppose, involve two ages:

I look to the future; you to the past.

Yet it is true I write about the present,
and you shall find your own times pictured here.

Reality never changes, for I fear
both waterfall and rainbow are incessant.

But Time itself is a strange paradox
bounded and yet unbounded: all the clocks
tell the same hour, ignoring centuries.

Wherefore all my writing probably is
(unknowing to myself) some deep, vague plea
for just this temporal immortality.

Some Come Here to Sit and Think

Yet *you* MY immortality? Poo-poo!
Your feeble memory a sepulchre
where, at your pleasure, you can disinter
ME? Oh! what an ideal, to pursue
a struldbrug immortality in *you*!
Are you, or not, an adequate avatar?
Of course, you preen yourself and think you are,
then reconsider modestly. Hoo! hoo!

No: for such survival I should worry!
Hail and farewell! Gesundheit! Skoal! Prosit!
Here I go, leaving behind just guck and gurry.
I pull the chain (all deaths are suicide);
commit my last nuisance; with a wise-crack, glide
down the gulp of the cosmic water-closet.

Strip off the clothes -

the flesh -

the skeleton:

nothing remains.

But force the small door set
neat in the brow, the bosom, loins, or feet
(the bosom-door be it!); then look:

another one,

another . . .

Welling blackness, welling cold,
a needle-shot, minnying ether rather than air.
- Is this all that the beating breast may hold?

No:

small and hard as a marble, a moon
leaps up into the blank bosom,
shedding a sleet
of coarse wild light on cloudy rocks,
to set

abruptly, behind a silhouette of dune.

But the last door? Has anyone reached there?

Did he open? What did he find?

No one has told.

Perhaps he saw, froze dumb in full despair.

Black the Moon rose, and she descended black,
invisible in the dazzle of western light.

An angel hypnotized by the excessive bright,
lost in adoration, she turned her back
(pure shadow) on us, while her predestined track
high she rode towards the sun in wild delight,
blazing with beauty. But to my dull sight
black the moon rose, and she descended black.

And my own globe of blackness? Can it be
that though this side is darkness visible,
unchanged in perigee or apogee,
the other side flames wild with ecstasy,
dazzled with God, oblivious to this hell?
Is there this side, which I can never see?

"With how sad steps -

O Moon - ?" - and lo! the moon replied to me.

"I draw the adoring oceans to their flood;

"I wring from girls the tribute of their blood;

"I stimulate love, poetry, lunacy.

"I set the dogs to howling - also thee;

"I lift the soul asleep beneath its load

"till its feet wander in dream-antipode.

"But of all this, I am ignorant utterly:

"for I died in the very act of birth,

"the still-born, only child of thine own earth.

"I know nothing of madness, oceans, love.

"My voice thou hearest is thine, lost in the night,

"echoed from death; this magical moonlight

"a mere reflection of some fire far-off."

O yearning moon, never to reach your sun!
He fills you with his light, but knows you not.
O yearning ocean, never to reach your moon!
who fills you with light, giving she cares not what.

And though my rayless mood were the reverse
side of occult, absolute ecstasy,
the heartless pleasure of life remains my curse,
torches torturing as sun - moon, moon - sea.

Yet no: the moon circles me; and I in turn
circle the distant sun: and we all burn,
shedding our sticky ash in filaments
which weave their spiderwebs of influence
round and round about through the silent air,
binding our victims with our own despair.

Miss Jephthah

It Shouldn't Be Let Happen To Such A Nice Girl

Fled from the intolerableness of pity
into the core of the incandescent city,

she hides in one small room of a hotel,
her angry brain sealed in its ivory cell,
her heart dark in its crimson cave as well,

For the dread Crab has found her for his food.
Swimming the warm, slow rivers of her blood,
all the sweet reaches of her maidenhood
he ranges, settling on the bosom's bud.

Dumb-lipped, through her closed window high above
the singing streets, she hears the theme-song of
radios pretending everyone can love.

Up and down the elevators goes she,
wailing the waste of her virginity.

When?

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Memorial blank

When did you die? No one recalls that day.
It is a blank page in my diary,
and blank, mercifully blank, in my memory.
All I remember is this: the sun shone grey.
Oh, the dim lilacs! flower of death in May,
of young death, cleanly bath of purity,
haunting, taunting, always reminding me,
reminding me, always pointing the way.

Not in the earth, but deep within my heart
were you interred, with spiritual spade;
and now, darling, you are forever part
of me, beneath the tremulous lilac-shade.

Yet - yet - now I sense a weird, profound misgiving
that it was I who died. . . You are still living?

Ah, once beloved! - half-loved for half a day -
you have preceded me into the ground,
yet putting up, above your modest mound,
a small white stone out of the grassless clay,
like an initialed handkerchief, to say
(if anybody anywhere is found
asking your whereabouts in the profound)
that you, ahead of us, passed through this way.

Evasive beloved! Even as the kiss
I dreamed of planting on your breast in joke
blazes, a star floating beyond all strife,
so you still live somewhere in the abyss.

Abruptly, remembering you were dead, I woke.
Could waking be our death? and death, real life?

- *clutching me by the throat, interrupts the anecdote.*

Hah! insolent He breaks out his fever-flag
in these thin cheeks, signaling my collapse,
while captured squads of life-blood with hoarse brag
are tumbled over the ramparts of my lips.

Too late we learned how the fifth column crept
into my citadel, even to the seat of breath,
and organized their cells, until they leapt -
already victorious - to the standard of Death.

Well, at least soon there'll be the end of fleeing
from the just punishment for that original sin
unguessed, never committed. (But did I? - I?)

And when I sink into the heart of Being,
stripped of consciousness shall I stand within,
stark naked under a furious lidless Eye?

Strike Up the Band!

(Swing low)

And now majestically the end of Time
approaches me! Staring, I watch expand
a blank oblong, no bigger than a hand
but spreading as it nears me unsublime.
I stare: the grave-shaped Shadow shadowless
looms in a squall-blast, blackening the skies,
blowing off my last hair, my teeth, ears, eyes
away into meaningless nothingness;
then, like a box-trap, falls.

Of course, above it
I see the descending angel-squadron, dressed
in azure prettily trimmed with rose and white,
playing wall-eyed on their preraphaelite
instruments "Hearts & Flowers", which I detest;
but I will smile and swear to them I love it.

What was I? That I cannot say; and you
can hardly guess, because I could not say.
Call me a sleeper who took night for day,
and who imagined that his dreams were true.
Some were lost chaoses without a clue,
some trivial, some terrible, some gay;
some were mere memories of yesterday,
but some were beauty organized anew.

These came nearest the dawn; symbols ascending
flowered, while the unguessed sky became a prism
above a sun rising inexorably.

And I, feeling Reality impending,
sobbed in self-pitying sentimentalism
- sobbed *to the dream!* - "I die; remember me."

When in my solar plexus, the world sags, a lead ball,
and my tired knees feel too weak to lug me up the stairs,
and every face I meet is a hostile stone wall
mortared solid with ooze of terrors and despairs;
when I recall no smile unrooted in dry tears
(since every tenderness springs from a deeper hurt);
when searching my whole life back through diminishing years,
the only milestones are the friends who did me dirt;
then, when Time stops between yesterday and tomorrow
and favorite books are weary series of blank pages,
and on my soul rolls, like low thunder, all the sorrow
and fear which is Mankind through ages upon ages, -
O then, what thought shall make my heart at heaven's gate sing?
I do not know although I have read of such a thing.

Life is the big neighborhood party, me lad,
to which you weren't invited. And so what.
Don't brood they meant to leave you out - that's bad;
try to pretend somehow you were forgot.
Don't happen past, and hope to be asked in:
you'd only smirk and stammer like a fool.
No! Make them sorry! Fill them with chagrin! -
- Swipe all the beer left on the porch to cool!

But that would show you care.

No, take a chance -

walk in as though you owned the place - be brash
and grab the prettiest girl and make her dance.

(This is one party that you cannot crash.)
- So, go home; climb into bed and try to sleep.
(The cold, deep bed and your long, long last sleep.)

"To thine own self be true. . ."

O ghastly parody

Of my dark soul, O body (brother Cain) !

Which is mine own self?

And in Christian charity

Tell me, what is the truth, O Pilate brain?

What is my self but a God-cheated Ahab,

A proud mad cripple everybody loathes;

And the soiled loins, prededicate to Rahab,

Shrink, cinctured in self-polluted clothes.

The horizon closes in, thorned and shrivelling!

The snake-spear rears, biting the heart's blood!

The nails! -

And so I find myself stand snivelling

Where once that saint, heroic Jesus, stood.

(My audience, the angels, bored blasé

And tired of laughing, have all slipped away.)

O Tears Wrung from Seraphic Fire,
is my Life a Perfect Work of Art?

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Creator of my dreams, therefore of me,
who knows me, and who never can be known,
lolling on an inviolable throne
deep below woe, in pure serenity,
do you indeed laugh with daemonic glee
at all my wanderings, blunderings alone?
How in eternity do you atone
for the disasters of my tragedy?

Tragedy? Comedy? Tragedy of Errors!
which you, the author, watch, amused yet tense
over your complications of my farces.
Do you contrive this plot of tears and terrors
to edify an angelic audience
with some profound and exquisite catharsis?

Mysterious Arena

Here I come, whether ready or not

Dazzled after the blackness of my cell
wherein so long I secretly was jailed,
now in the loud arena I see too well
the grinning teeth of the Emperor unveiled.

Vast audience, tiered by centuries, year on year!
late I sat with you, bored, amused, then thrilled.
Still you sit there at ease, while I face here
the time when I am slowly, horribly, killed.

I pity you all, so gaily plumed and gemmed:
you too shall wake one midnight, gagged and gyved,
rushed to the unjust tribunal, be condemned
to some foul death the Emperor has contrived.

Ave! Salve! Vale! Now nears my hour,
Mortido, when I pass beyond your power.

No, no - we like good music now and then;
but classics all day long, always repeating
without a break, is something else again!
And then your system of excess of bright
must ruin even the cherubs' eyes - so glarey!
How can you sleep? - make love - if there's no night?
Infinity sounds dreadfully cold and dreary:
we have refrigerating and central heating.

Your heaven, I fear, would bore us past all yawning,
(*Willie! behave yourself! Bury that talent!*)
while here all of us men are strong and rich, -
(*What's that?*) - and all the girls are gay and gallant.
Ah, you must go? Yes, it is near to dawning.
Close the gate tight.

(*Halloo! a witch! Witch! WITCH!*)

We are the freaks, the silent shrieks, all wrecked
in our conceiving or upbreeding; we
are hunchback minds, halt bodies, all elect
to failure and contemptibility.

Forego your jeering; let us make the joke;
be we your clowns with bladder, blunder, shove.

- Hark! that was our tongue-cut seer who spoke.
And he whose heart was ripped out preaches love:
Why all the selfishness? Why all the hate?

We cripples know exactly what's to lose:
our maims are visions. Yet we unaidables
see those whom we would die to help, refuse
all aid whatever, till it is too late.

They drop, drop, drop, into their separate hells.

No: let go, parents; let go with your heart;
relax its clutch, lest your own heart be riven
with that crazed breakage which, for all its smart,
never opens a gateway into heaven.

Let the boy go. The path which you have trod
he will not tread; nor shall his own path straighten.
Cease to assume that you should be his god:
when you did so, you merely made a satan.

The death-wish has him; he adores the devil
of your creation - challenges damnation.
Your final good is evermore his evil;
therefore your evil might be his salvation.

May he plod the whole path predestined his
into a Happiness which (though not yours) is.

Head-foremost toward the imminent accident, ghost
after ghost swoops, twisting helpless wild
hands, shrieking in a ring: "Look! The child!
The match! Stop it! *Fire!*"

So the most;
but some few wiser spirits sit, knees crossed
in spectral armchairs, now quite reconciled
to these brief tragedies, - instead, beguiled
with the neat plotting of the holocaust.

O reader (*ghost to me*), which do you do?
Read the portents invisible to my dark,
shouting unheard, while the accidental spark
smoulders, until the hidden brain white-hot
bursts into flame of act? -

Or do you not,
but sit, reading comfortably?

(Look! Ghosts ring *you* - !)

HEADLINES!!! - The stomach surges in disgust.

SUBHEADS! - why, it's a national disgrace!

The Article! - my eyes devour; - and must

I tolerate, then pity, then - ? - NO, NO, NO!

A murderer lurks in me; therefore I revel

vicariously in the raping and the pain:

I am both victim and blood-lapping devil,

such ways I keep and pass and turn again.

Let not that guilt, wherein soul-sunk I read,

obsess me till I am identified

with him in mutual Satanic vanity,

lest also I permit one little deed,

then offer *myself* to be crucified

to expiate the guilt of all humanity.

Now every morning, on an inside page,
is a fresh lot of war-dead photographs,
with brief biographies, brief epitaphs.
Scarcely one lad is yet of legal age.

Not the whole body: just the unsmiling head.
I look at you, and you stare back at me.
In my eyes is the last of life you'll see.
Is it worth it? - How dead-pan are the dead!

Too much of this will put me out of sorts;
therefore I shrug it off with "This is war",
and I shall have forgotten you before
I turn the page, to comic-strips and sports.

There is no help for it, this side the moon.
So, so long fellows! I'll be seeing you soon.

Now, grappling on the greased chute to the tomb,
compelled, man grasps for better or for worse
the ultimate power of the universe,
hoping to cheat somehow the general doom.

Now the end of the endless warfare from
Adam, with his innate, mysterious curse,
speeds all his offspring to the sudden hearse
of earth itself. A planet murdered! Boom!

Blame not the tool. The real bomb is that
bone-bubble blown upon the human spine
by Nature some half-million years ago,
- the Skull and its dread contents. Scat, man, scat!
Your experiment fails, ended by sunshine.
Down to the gentler brontosaurus below!

Marche funebre, lento

Put on your solemnest clothes, your solemnest
face: hire brass and blare out Chopin; we
trudge graveward to the tune; the decent knee
touches the mud (dust unto dust).

The best

of men is dead!

Proclaim throughout the rest
of the wide world we praise impartially
the genius that he was (or thought to be).

Surely we pass with honors the Christian test.

For he is dead (harmless). Let us admit
frankly we wronged him - now that we are able
to feast upon that spiritual fare of his,
that wisdom we insisted was false wit.
We all forgive him: harmless, calculable,
now he is dead.

(Are you so sure he is?)

Yes, we p----d in his face - was not that human?
(We wash it clean with this official tear.)
We lost his job - he skidded in our smear.
We burned his book (I still think it quite common).
(*Did he leave manuscripts?*) - And then, that woman!
But count the flowers heaped upon his bier -
the cost would have paid his grocer one full year!
Really more expiation is due no man.

Coda: "'Twere to consider too curiously''.

Now he is safe (and we are safe), for now
he is made one with Nature -

for see there:

up he sprouts, in a Resurrection lily
reincarnated!

- Whoa! head off that cow!

- Too late: she cropped him.

Pantheism, where -

whither - our hero now?

It is all too silly.

No Buddy Knows de Trubble

(It is inadvisable to go to your own funeral.)

*He was the very king of kindly wit,
and so we thought him happiest. What surprise
when death revealed . . . Yet (now we think of it)
wherever else were seen such tragic eyes?
We never even guessed his tragedy:
No! nor his guts in willing not to die!
But well he knew his generosity
would be appreciated by and by.*

THAT'S WHAT THEY'LL THINK OF ME.

But when he read
in his friends' hearts, he saw only too well
nowhere a clear, whole-hearted approbation,
But friendship tempered with cool reservation,
indifference with a muddled toleration,
amusement founded on shrewd estimation,
jealousy fertile with false accusation,
selfishness with its murderous calculation . . .

OH, cried the ghost, I WISH THAT I WERE DEAD!
BUT OH! ALAS! one cannot die in hell.

He rushed to greet me when he heard my key,
 and danced his adoration such a way
 that my heart, ash-choked by the smouldering day,
 leapt into flame of quiet clarity.
 Perfect in faith and hope and charity,
 he never guessed the ghosts he drove away,
 no, nor the furies with their lash and bray:
 he knew only the very best of me.

When in the final dusk I feel his nose
 insinuated under my dying hand,
 I shall know that I near the borderland
 which his love threaded through the darkening snows.
 And when we reach that gate of pearl and rose,
 sole witness to my character might he be!

Books unto Book

A little Usnea

is good for whatever ails you.



Here I am again!

Starvation kills slowly and unespied.
So it killed him, because he was too proud
(or cowardly?) to steal, or beg aloud;
and secretly he expired. (Suicide?)

At his dim funeral, he is personified
by me, hired to mime before the crowd
him-in-the-box. I do it without shroud
to fool all those who never heard he died.

And yet - suppose - Did I hear something stir
inside the coffin descending into the grave?
Shall I shout "Stop the burial!" and save...?

Impossible to save. Far happier
to let the coffin sink, and let the knave
stifle to death. And never disinter.

Come with me! Look!

Look down - but hold your breath.

In the abyss - there: see! -

What is that flying?

those forms of fog writhing and liquifying -

Why, they are men struggling, drowning in death!

What stench, treacheries! what crucifying!

diseases, madresses, exposed entrails,

malformations, throats cut on broken grails -

all the dirt and indignities of dying.

"Listen!" desperately each voice calls and wails;

"For you! - no matter how this body drowns -

"I learned The Secret! . . ." There the voices stop.

At our feet drop dead clots of books, slap, slap,

replacing voices; over them pours in veils

pall upon pall of academic gowns.

Some dead remain, fouled statues on their tomb,
some vanish to a voice in the night air,
some burst to flame, an all-consuming glare,
some melt to water of a fecund womb,
but all the rest accept the common doom,
resolve to earth; even the coffin's care
(that last defence of pride) rots in despair
and sheds their uselessness beneath the loam;

whilst I, on tattered paper wings, would soar
with valiant labored flappings toward the sky -
prevent me, heaven! lest some unpinioned bore
clutch inescapably my trailing toe
in hopes that he immortally may fly,
emitting footnotes on the crowd below.

Necromancy in the Necropolis

This is the cemetery of old souls,
humanity's paper memory of desire,
of hope and fear, greed, bigotry, love and ire,
encysted in their numbered pigeon-holes.
Our Great with academic aureoles
are dead - hence harmless: now we may admire
the lava of their once Vesuvian fire.
(Careful! lest ashes hide some undead coals.)

Coffined in leather, bound in linen sheets,
the form preserved with all the printer's art,
behold the emptied brain, the chalky heart,
the mummied loins, now unsarcophagussed.
Toy as you like with Shakespeare, Melville, Keats!
Open the bookcase doors, and -

Fie! what dust!

I AM, I want, I will possess mine own.
My diamond crown fills everything with light.
(He sets His sheepish Son upon the throne?
It shall be mine.) - Ah! the excessive bright!
(Seal tight the inner door.) I will; I can,
though He oppose me in conceited spite,
being admittedly jealous. He makes a man,
I spoil it with a worm-plugged apple-core;
and so the Son falls out of the frying pan
into my fire. (Seal tight the outer door.)
I snicker at the silly hypocrite,
snug at my realm they all are greedy for,
as this is heaven, nor am I out of it.

O Mother Muse, whose silver throat and breast
were once my song, my food, my sky, my rest,

Whose supple hand guided my boy-man's fire
upon the cords of the paternal lyre,

Yours the pure melody and mine the words
saved the wild heroes from the Siren birds,

Yours the inaudible, evil spell that bred
the secret serpent of my marriage bed,

But mine the song that broke the infernal bars
and found my bride midst gulfs of dripping stars,

Then could not hold her. All Hell shuddered. Whose
victorious voice shrieked "Kill him!", Mother Muse?

And flung my head, still singing in my dream,
down the red eddies of the Thracian stream.

I am the dawning star, who from the deep
lifts' the bright dream from out the gate of horn;
I too the evening star - all travel-worn
thought I lead to the ivory fold of sleep.
Magnet of love-in-idleness, I keep
the moth-lamp marking the mist-hidden bourn
where springs the eglantine without a thorn.
Come to the smiling eyes that never weep.

As the dim veils of consciousness divide,
look! - you may look fully - and see again
the face, the unsagging breasts, the gliding side,
the dimpled depilated abdomen
without the fissure.

What am I? Maybe
your friend - maybe the secret enemy.

Hist! Reader-Thisbe! Listen to my low call,
your Pyramus whispering through this paper wall.

The parents sleep: slip out into the gloom,
down to our trysting-place at Ninus' tomb.
There love awaits you - love! I bid you come!

(Yes: it is I the corpse whom you hear sing,
serenading you, Life, on your heart-string:
Death is ever amorous hungering
for life: death has nought - life has everything.)

Down to the tomb, O Thisbe, my adored!
Here at the tomb awaits your love, your lord.
Here I await you (lioness . . . corpse . . . sword).

Come, Thisbe, come! (And you are coming - yea,
since your begetting have been on your way.)

*You talk as though the dead desire to wive,
but there I think do none embrace. - Ah, no?
Surely the dead are dead! Do you think so?*
Listen: your "dead" are all buried alive!
Stifled, strangling, they vanish, but contrive
(shroud-bound, strait-coffined, buried deep, sod-sealed,
then weighted down with slate-stone) unrevealed
to wait their hour, knowing that they survive.

When the bell strikes, they have their quaint amours
which (being fleshless) are insatiate.
The midnight resurrections run their course
of country-dances till the last star beams.
The furies of those fleshless loves are great.
When do they rise? Every night, in your dreams.

I have outlived the moon, for I have paced,
delighted in its dazzle, all its phases;
deliberate in deliciousness have traced
each shining house's labyrinthine mazes.
Deep-set within the shifting diamond hazes
in every cusp I found a deity's shrine,
but after offering incense, singing praises,
I learned at last no deity is divine.
So now, clear-eyed for all the lunar wine,
completely gratified I reach the end;
those who have really lived hail Proserpine,
the only true and everlasting friend.
Dark o' the moon, the perfect burial plot,
marked in the almanac by a black dot.

Yea, once I also twanged at my small lyre,
yodelling in the universal hosanna,
but soon got bored shouting "Great is Diana!"
and so I cleaned the whole thing up with fire.
Oh, my great climbing flames, that raised me higher
than priests, than gods, with all their silly story!
making their vanity a funeral pyre
which was the altar of my greater glory.

I AM

the unpredictable, inexplicable foe,
spark from the dark, belly-laugh of Below;
I am the smirk when everything tumbles down,
puck of the perverse, skids under civilization,
the discreating curse of all creation;
I am your shadow, and I wear a crown.

Beneath the frigid and innumerable haze
of Fixed Stars driven by a dark power behind
stands the Saturn-skull of humankind,
celestial sphere and sealed hermetic vase.
Within it, globes conglobed swirl, phase on phase
rotating in a geometric grind.
The innermost is Earth, our conscious mind,
impaled by all the planetary rays.

Oh, whirlpool snarl of influences! – Saturn,
Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, Luna
shed virtues now beneficent, now malign;
but at the center of the gordian pattern
revolve within Earth's core (Fata-Fortuna)
two lightless, unguessed planets: Dis and Proserpine.

Pandare

In love's ballet I hopped always behind:
 no girl ever seemed worthy of the pain;
 yet urging love to others was but kind.
 (The fox and goat conspired in my brain.)
 And that black night of planetary rain,
 which loved I more: young Troilus or my niece,
 when I manoeuvred them into full bliss?

Now my proud name is made a common noun
 because I brought those youngsters breast to breast.
 Do I deserve that infamous renown?
 (By what invisible lust was I possessed?
 Can one be damned for sins one never guessed?
 Oh tell me, all futurity, is there no
 mercy for those who know not what they do?)

Alas for me? Speared to my death between
benefic Venus and malefic Mars,
I rose through sphere in sphere, until serene
I reached the final crystal of Fixed Stars,
whence now, above the planetary wars
I saw below, pierced by Achilles' shaft,
my ruined corpse; and seeing it, I laughed -

at what? Why, I was finally above
heroic slaughter on the field of war
and the long routine of chivalric love
(whore playing lady? lady playing whore?).
Therefore I laughed in the celestial door,
released from all unnatural ideal
into the bliss of the completely real.

Abandoned in the planet-smitten city
dominated by Helen, that mere whore,
widowed I dwelt alone, with none to pity;
then, while Troy-walls eroded in the war,
fidelity to one at last I swore,
but after his year's patient, arduous wooing,
slid to another in two months' pursuing.

Traitor loneliness! Dreadful joys that speed
so fast away! To the sole nightingale
what mattered it if Troilus, Diomedé,
or yet another echoed his sweet wail?
Tragedy is the spring of each love-tale,
also its termination; and I hear
dead laughter filling every heavenly sphere.

Two women, chained together, rise. The first:

"I am the Vortex downward, called the Flesh,
"Vessel of Love, the Pit wherefrom the fount
"Of Life jets upward, ever hot and fresh.
"My sometime consorts have been past my count.
"(Although my shriveling skin sags to the skull,
"One kiss! - then am I not young? beautiful?)"

The second woman two small spaniels nursed:

"I am the Vortex upward, called the Soul,
"Spire of Love, the Tip wherefrom the fount
"Of Life floods downward, conquering the whole
"Being to Spirit. (Ah! how, how to surmount
"The murdered image of the baby Christ
"Hymning Her to whom It was sacrificed?)"

Drunk on the wine of God that fatal day,
against the Plague, devourer of all good,
we swore a sacred oath of brotherhood
to slay the Deathless, whom but Christ can slay.

Fatal presumption! Fatal arrogance!
We to the real death, Damnation, sold
our own immortal spirits for some gold,
not recognizing Him through ignorance.

O glut for gold! Under the fatal tree
we ate and drank damnation without care
beside the brother we had murdered there.
I am the Pardoner. Who shall pardon me?

Damned, compelled, I spread the Pestilence.
Come, buy your Christ for thirty silver pence!

That was a pretty toy of Ptolemy's,
the conglobed crystals rounding a pure chord
to cradle man against catastrophes,
all for the greater glory of the Lord.
But in my brain I tried it, felt it yield,
then burst, the simulacrum of a spell
woven by wizards. Its vanishing revealed
the endless chaos where we ever dwell.
Nowhere may Archimedes fix his stand;
no up or down for god or worshipper;
nothing exists above us or below:
no Primal Mover with gigantic hand
to spin us; nowhere for falling Lucifer -
nowhere for the ascending Christ - to go.

Everybody loves a fat man

The lad with bloated belly and lank purse
wins no war-ransoms, makes no wealthy marriage.
Forget that my obesity was a curse -
laugh your own guts out at my portly carriage!

Hal, whom I grew to love (acting that part),
never would see my desperate need of aid;
therefore so easily he crushed my heart,
breaking the promise never really made.

O God, God, God! I could a tale upchoke
dirtier than tragic poet ever dreamt.
But better to be an everlasting joke,
making men laugh (thinking themselves the witty),
than give up, yield, sink into self-contempt,
bawling abroad for everybody's pity.

Actor to Actor: Alas, Poor Which?

A pestilence on him for a mad rogue.

This book in your hand is Yorick's actual skull,
answering back through the thick graveyard fog.

- Hello, you Hamlet! Listen for once: don't hog
the entire conversation! You're too full
of that most musical, melancholy, beautiful
interminable interior monologue.

A bad, bad habit! - dunks you in the bog
of pure self-pity - and it gets SO DULL!

Now: you are deaf because you are never mute.

So, Life, shut up! and hearken to the Corse:

it is high time you listen to another.

Music adores a vacuum; as lute to lute,
so does my empty pate echo in yours.

- And smell so? Pah!

- Pee-you yourself, my brother.

Racked to death throughout life! And shall the earth
belong alone to the meek, strong, and wise?

To live, must we not grasp their good through lies
and mask our indirections with our mirth?

Admittedly we are of little worth,
judged by the twelve commandments; but no eyes
read our dark hearts. God dare not moralize
on the defects he gave us at our birth.

Yet - my revenge, accomplished, turned to error
and vanished, expiated. Life was purged
by death; nothing at all remained thereof,
except the internal truth, which now upsurged.

Even my basic hate was burned by terror
down to its real root, a hidden love.

Copernicus searched outward; whereas I
searched inward, even to the primal Ire,
and saw the smouldering roots of the Dark Fire
and the Triangle with the lidless Eye.
Here the astringent Pride contracts awry;
from it outgrasps convulsive the Desire,
the two tearing apart, until in gyre
the Wheel of Anguish turns. I heard the Schrei . . .

The dark world is the Father's Wrath - is Hell.
From this deep evil, everything has issue.
This is the root of life; here Satan fell;
here you shall fall, forevermore to dwell
lost in the Wrath after you die, unless you -

[What follows is wholly unintelligible.]

Do you sleep yet, annihilated, waiting
the miracle of the Millenium?

Your dream is ended, that the Son shall come
splitting the spheres, Creation discreating.
Helpless we sail an abyss, anticipating
nothing whatever in our vacuum;
our wisest men have vainly sought to plumb
the void we drift in, endlessly oscillating.

Yet your lost lips still whisper "Liberty":
and as the old abuses clutch more power,
exalting mortal fear and living shame,
there comes the sound of an awakening sea:
your golden trumpets vomiting red flame
summon Beauty and Truth to win the hour.

He tossed his only child out of the window,
bludgeoned to death his wife when she protested,
killed the policeman who then came to arrest him,
killed judge, jury, and hangman in one bunch.
Evading Death, he even slew the Devil,
and with the corpse he choked and poisoned Hellmouth.
Both human and divine Justice he thwarted, -
and all the children applauded Mr. Punch.

I too am worked by interior alien fingers;
but sensing the inextinguishable laughter
of baby cherubim, chortling in a throng
at the antics of Mr. Punch and Mrs. Judy
and the delightfully perfect Triumph of Evil,
can we say that the author wrote it wrong?

Who wakes me from the Real, where charioted
upon a wild thrill of the nightingale
sleeping we soar together in one veil,
my Moon and I, at last forever wed?
Who wakens me from that delicious bed,
naming the name which lived without avail?
What is the voice I hear, mortally pale,
reminding me that somewhere I am dead?

My body was the urn, wherein my heart
between the putrifying lungs was buoyed;
my poetry was the painted scene outside.
There is the hollow secret of my art,
the mortuary Grecian Urn, now void.
Maybe in some museum it has not died.

Death is the elder; Love, his sister-bride;
he the male skeleton, she the magnetic womb;
he the spadesman, she the creative loom;
he fallen Adam, she sprung from his side.
Standing upon a grave I prophesied
that both perish together, but the tomb
sank to a vortex . . .

O lost Ulalume,
the buried dead have never wholly died!

For dread Astarte, star ungordianed
from the loins, rises up through the leonine
heart, kindling the already white-hot brain;

then from the sepulchre stretches a fleshless hand
darkening upward into the sapphirine,
and black phalanges pinch it out again.

Look! In the dim, grim library, with door
and windows locked, pooled in the spreading stains
of fascinating and repulsive gore
lie the emphatic, enigmatic Remains.
On the cold hearth, stabbed through the heart aghast!
Twelve suspects: which? We are horribly unsure,
till one by one, eleven are stabbed. The last,
trapped, confesses he was the murderer.

Yet was he? The detective, you recall,
was close at hand when every corpse expired.
But the author! He it was devised all blunders
for You. O Dream-Devourer, they were all
spun to glut what you have so deep-desired.

("MUSTN'T!" a bodiless roar bluntly thunders.)

O secret brother, are you not loin-sick?
Satyr whom every real man would despise
(did he suspect) and tear off your disguise,
then turn you out with a contemptuous kick.
The captain of your soul is lunatic;
Yillah is lost, forgotten; Hautia's eyes
are turned perversely down. When shall uprise,
to smash your vessel, leper Moby Dick?

Ahab, Taji, Bartleby, Pierre,
Benito, Clarel, Claggart, Ishmael -
all symbolizing the unspeakable.
Study these stripped case-histories from hell,
and then, American mast-spine, no despair:
sail on, dear brother! I have escaped to tell.

Maturity is managing a deadlock
by which to check Fate till the final Rest.
But children! - I had three sons born in wedlock,
who were the very things I had suppressed:
Dmitri, offspring of the furious cod;
Ivan, the frigid offspring of the brain;
Alyosha of the heart, fleeing toward God.

Which was the sin whose hatred struck me dead?

Dmitri, condemned, was innocent - also was
the unnoted murderer of an innocent lad.

Ivan, horrified to find he was the cause,
confessed; but everybody thought him mad.

Alyosha, at the innocent's grave, began
to lead an unending cheer for triune Man.

The subtlest, bitterest foes are those who dwell
in one's own house, we learned in babyhood.
Woe and thrice woe to her who lives in Hell
and does not cry: "Evil, be thou my good!"

So I, the older girl, renounced desire
to match the others at their deviltry,
tempering my woman's heart in their black fire
till it was steel, to shield my Emily.

I beat them all! with dagger and disguise,
with fraud and bickering and poison-tooth;
thus I became Empress of Hate and Lies,
and Emily, High-Priest of Love and Truth.

"Damned?" you say, "damned for the greater glory?"
Why, you have not half-understood my story.

Three Views of Harriet Craig
(*For George Kelly*)

75

I

Out of what rancid hovel crept the witch?
The demon summoned from what inner cleft?
The incubus begotten in what ditch?

The hag at every portal weaves her weft,
fetid webs over eye and ear, which make
each smile translate to lust, each word to theft.

The demon holds the heart; and lest it break
even while it hardens, he girds it with his dread
tail-swallowing, ever-contracting snake.

Clinging in the dank curtains of the bed,
the incubus suffuses his obscene
curse on the groom, and holds the bride instead.

In what forgotten cell, unheard, unseen,
lies suffocating toward death the true queen?

O lost, lost soul! created to be human,
yet from childhood ever self-atrophied,
all sympathies unexercised, gone rigid:
eyes that see not; tongue that has never spoken;
ears closed to melody; nostrils unshaken;
the heart, harder for never being broken
(who now could ever make it breathe and bleed?);
the ice-locked loins, that should have given, taken,
refusing man, therefore denying woman;
every portal sealed from within, frost-frigid,
ever betrayed by sudden lust, blind greed,
ever grasping, never giving - Lost, lost!
The kingdoms of the world at what a cost!

"Now we own all!" the Selfhood cried; and she
(in what sick hour) at last beheld his face.

She said: "Your All is nothing but disgrace.

"When Life is sin, Death is but decency.

"How mad my years whilst you ensorcelled me!

"But I return your wages: time, space,

"this queendom of your world. Yea, I erase

"us both, and thus revert to reality."

Stiff in her emptied house, at the tea-tray

sits Mrs. Craig, her lovely face gone grey.

Unclenched at last, her hands lie on her knees.

The tea-cup stands there with the tell-tale lees.

Cancel our condemnations. Heap upon her
not even pity; but for her victory, honor!

Time-Space is one, an unnamed thing out-wheeled
bifold, as stage for all the things that are.

Gravitation and the magnetic field
are also one thing, spiralling circular.

Every flower has its especial star;
strength in secret each from the other draws.

The Ens and the Minute Particular
curve round, touch, and are one without a pause.

And from a single source, Effect and Cause
spring, though in sequence seemingly they move.

One is the Universe and one its laws;
and yet that unity I cannot prove
till I connect the indifferent sun and moon
to my close violin's spontaneous tune.

George Spelvin

79

Oh for a genuine passion to play!

Would I not tatter it and split your ears!

Spelvin's the name. Do you remember me?

George Spelvin, of the faceless common rout;

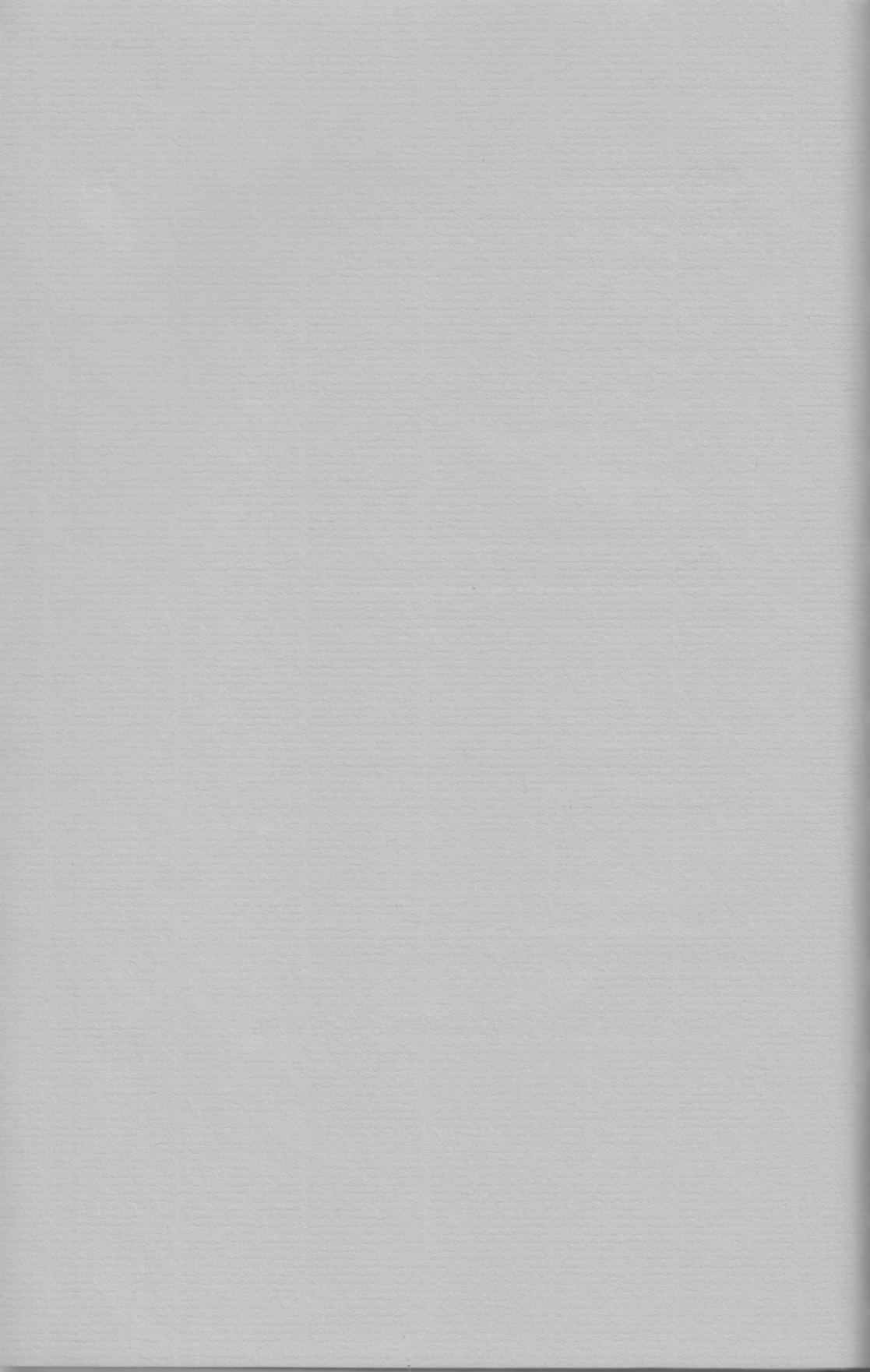
and yet I also serve, for I am the
unmemorable helper who fills out:

the bored attendant at the heroes' flyting,
the first pike-thruster in the crucial fighting,
wine-pourer at the subsequent palaver,
and always, always, always the cadaver.

Well, it is right to be a convenience
in the greater design, and I am game -
all patterns require their many-threaded warps.

But I should like to star, just once!
as hero, cast under my real name,
and not forever be the conquered corpse.

Next Time I Wish You'd Remember My Name.



Inconclusive Epilogue



I

This eve is Hallowe'en, feast of the souls.
Here they come, pushing and staring, out of the fog
into the dimmed room: nameless horrors, ghouls,
crones, idiots, to enjoy Life's epilogue.

Ho for the dance! The witch pursues the devil,
the lone ghost hugs its emptied skeleton;
all the old cruelties, fears, all forms of evil
revive and revel again, fearless of dawn.

Now for the supper!

Instantly they unmask.

Look! they are children gleeful with innocence.
Popcorn, apples, icecream are what they ask;
all the terrors were exquisite pretence.

And thus humanity's ancient sins and shames
dissolve into the children's innocent games.

But this is Hallowe'en of the thaumaturge.
Music: my skull-drum, your rib-xylophones.
The show: an X-ray movie of blurred bones
jigging the Danse Macabre upon the verge.
Enjoy my party! Laugh heartily, I urge.
This book is my catharsis (free from groans);
may you enjoy, too, on your private thrones,
a good, healthy, Aristotelean purge.

Americans, you are right! For he laughs best
who laughs both first and last: let it resound,
thrilling Byss and Abyss, from throat, breast,
belly, at this Boo from below. Have I clowned?
then laugh merrily! (Somewhere, blest or unblest,
my skull is grinning at you underground.)

who, me?

Goodbye! And now one thing at last is certain:

I gave the signal long ago myself
to the stage-hands when to ring down the curtain
upon this trashy drama of myself.

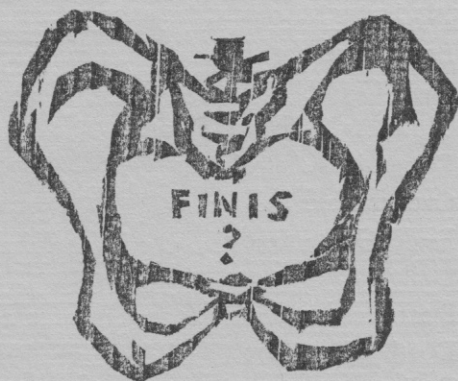
By whom was the long play so badly written,
so blurred, so inconclusive, but myself?
Who was it, passion-lashed and conscience-smitten,
played both the agonists but selfsame myself?

And in those characters, what histrionics,
stupidities, falsities, I wrote myself!
And who else were the villains and the comics,
the dancers, mobs, and orchestra, but myself.

Yes, even the scenery (not too bad): myself.
And you, the disgusted audience, - myself.

Go, little book! Released at last into
the sublunary air, follow me not
here underground, but lift your necrotic thought
on quick bat-wings filmy with graveyard dew.
Flit forth at dusk; scud over dell and scarp,
until you find some Byronic youth, like me
posed not completely unselfconsciously
beneath a weeping willow, with a harp.
Fly straight to him! Flutter about his eyes!
Fill his uneasy mind with strange surmise!
And if one of the cords is snapped or sprung,
light on his harp; lest something go unsung,
replace the missing note, however bad,
with your shrill shriek. He will be very glad.

Inscrutable to the Last
(or so He thought)



(Nonnulla desunt)

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